

research evidence for policy



Illegal mining in the Amarakaeri Communal Reserve, Peru, is destroying the forest and reducing biodiversity within the protected area and in adjacent communal lands. Photo: Jamil Alca

Making co-management work in protected areas with indigenous peoples in Bolivia and Peru

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Case studies featured here were conducted in Bolivia and Peru.

Policy message

- Involving indigenous people in managing protected areas requires an intercultural dialogue that takes their norms of resource use, their local knowledge, and their worldview as a starting point.
- Sustainable economic activities within protected areas must generate equal or higher income than extractive or illegal activities and must have a wider social reach.
- Legal frameworks and policies governing conservation, resource extraction, land tenure, and national development must be complementary, and sectoral authorities must coordinate their implementation.
- Governments must recognise and support local biodiversity management initiatives, regardless of whether they are linked with the formal protected area system.

- Sustainable and equitable management of biodiversity in protected areas
- inhabited by indigenous peoples is often a challenge. It requires an
- intercultural dialogue based on local norms of resource use and indige-
- nous knowledge. Moreover, mechanisms that generate economic incentives
- must be able to compete with income from illegal activities such as
- logging, mining, and land trafficking. Finally, efforts are needed to ensure
- that regulations and policies on conservation and resource extraction do
- not overlap and contradict each other, as this hampers efforts both to
- conserve biodiversity and to promote development at the local level.

Protected areas and indigenous peoples in Latin America: allies or opponents?

- Biodiversity will only be conserved in
- the long term if local people are
- actively involved in planning and
- managing its conservation. However,
- in the four cases studied and presen-
- ted here, the management of protec-
- ted areas is still disputed, and local as
- well as external people continue to
- exploit their resources in an unsus-
- tainable way.
- Bolivia and Peru host a wide range of
- biological and cultural diversity. At
- the same time, the economies of both
- countries rely extensively on the
- extraction of non-renewable natural
- resources such as minerals and
- hydrocarbons, which puts conserva-
- tion in conflict with development.

Both countries have established protected areas to conserve natural and cultural diversity. In some cases, indigenous peoples' organisations asked for a protected area to be created to prevent mining and logging by companies and colonists. In other cases, protected areas were created on external initiatives, and indigenous people consider them a threat to their territorial sovereignty. This policy brief outlines ways to achieve a more equitable and efficient management of biodiversity, based on findings of case studies on four protected areas.

Legal framework versus local reality

In Bolivia and Peru, legal institutions have been created to co-manage protected areas. However, these bodies are only consultative; they do

Featured case studies

Pilón Lajas Biosphere Reserve, Bolivia

Indigenous people's demand for secure land tenure was not satisfied by the collective property title given by the government. Illegal logging is more profitable than legal alternatives. Some indigenous people are clearing more forest to claim the land (Bottazzi 2008).

Amarakaeri Communal Reserve, Peru

Income from ecotourism and permitted traditional activities is insufficient to discourage illegal extraction of resources in the reserve. Indigenous people are disappointed by the lack of benefits brought by the reserve and distrust the government, which grants extractive concessions in the area (Alca 2008).

Tunari National Park, Bolivia

The category of National Park implies banning traditional productive activities and does not correspond to the area's conservation values. Even if the Park's administration recognises this inadequacy, lack of political will and reluctance to negotiate with local communities have left a legal void that undermines local biodiversity conservation initiatives (Boillat et al 2008).

Sierra del Divisor Reserved Zone, Peru

The majority of the indigenous population rejected the proposal to create a protected area because they feared that it would be a pretext for expropriation. Conservation organisations do not believe that indigenous people would resist pressure from companies wanting to extract resources and advocate the strictest conservation category (Oliart and Biffi 2010).

- not entail shared responsibilities and
- do not always reflect the social structure of the protected area.
- Although both countries legally recognise customary norms of natural resource use, few studies have been carried out on how to integrate these norms into co-management. In all four cases studied, the protected areas' formal legal frameworks
- actually contradict customary norms of access to land and resources.

Poor economic incentives for conservation

- In the four cases studied, indigenous individuals or groups were found to be involved in illegal extractive activities. The researchers observed that few people were able to make a living from legal activities in the protected areas, and most of these were indigenous leaders and families living near the areas' administrative centres. For the majority of inhabitants, economic activities that were compatible with biodiversity conservation did not generate enough income to offset the negative economic effects of resource use restrictions.

True mutual learning between actors rarely takes place

- Many conservation actors either ignore traditional resource management systems or adhere to the "fallen angel" myth (Berkes 2012), idealising the sustainability of the traditional way of life, while at the same time considering indigenous people unable to deal with external pressures for change. As a result, they accept indigenous management only if it is purely traditional, and disregard

ecological and social changes and indigenous peoples' right to self-determination. Those in favour of indigenous peoples managing protected areas also overlook local people's lack of the formal management skills needed to run such operations.

This highlights the need for true intercultural dialogue if protected areas are to be managed in ways that take into account the indigenous knowledge and the strengths and weaknesses of local communities. Both conservation actors and indigenous people will need training in communication skills if intercultural dialogue is to be mainstreamed into conservation practice.

Lack of coordination of legal frameworks

The Bolivian and Peruvian legal frameworks for conserving biodiversity are not coordinated with those for resource extraction, land tenure, and national development. Development based on resource extraction has been declared a national priority, overriding other considerations, including conservation. As a result, oil and mining concessions geographically overlap with protected areas, causing conservation regulations and local management norms to be ignored. In consequence, some indigenous organisations see protected areas as "Trojan horses" that are used by external actors to acquire concessions, overriding indigenous peoples' control over their territories. Recently, both countries introduced "prior consultation" requirements to regulate extractive activities in protected areas. However, the few such consultation processes that have been implemented thus far have been highly conflictive and politicized.

Politics are getting in the way of improving management

Protected areas and indigenous peoples have a high symbolic value in both Bolivia and Peru. Competing national political groups — often directly linked with opposing political parties — seek the support of social organisations based in protected areas in order to raise their own national profile, and this ends up sowing division. Those concerned about the issues become swept up in pro-conservation or pro-development groups, compromising efforts to



A traditional Tsimane house in the Pilon Lajas Biosphere Reserve, Bolivia.
Photo: Patrick Bottazzi

improve the management of protected areas by building a consensus.

Alternative ways to conserve biodiversity

The case studies revealed a number of grass-roots initiatives that support biodiversity, but were not necessarily directly related to the conservation and development activities of protected area authorities. These initiatives included local ecotourism complemented with agroecological production; promotion of traditional resource use and local knowledge; and community-based and municipal conservation areas. Such efforts are more likely to be successful if they are advocated and advanced by local people rather than solely by administrators of protected areas. Government recognition and support for these initiatives as well as introduction of true shared-management responsibility could help to overcome some of the antagonism towards protected areas among local people. Platforms for exchange could be built to promote these local initiatives within and outside protected areas.



Infrastructure in the Tunari National Park, Bolivia, lies in ruins because of lack of clarity about who is responsible for its upkeep.
Photo: Sébastien Boillat



- **Definitions**
- **Protected area:** A clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated, and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values (Dudley 2008: *Guidelines for Applying Protected Area Management Categories*).
- **Biodiversity:** The variability among living organisms from all sources, including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine, and other aquatic ecosystems, and the ecological complexes of which they are part: this includes diversity within species, between species, and of ecosystems (Art. 2, *Convention on Biological Diversity*).
- **Indigenous peoples:** Distinct peoples, with their own languages, cultures and territories, who have lived in a country since times prior to the formation of the current nation state. They have become disadvantaged and vulnerable as a result of colonial invasion of their territories either by international colonisation or by groups within the countries in which they live (Gray 1999: *Indigenous peoples, their environments and territories*).
- **The “fallen angel” myth:** This idealises indigenous people as living in perfect harmony with nature while they are isolated and disconnected from the market economy, and at the same time considers them a threat as soon as they are “contaminated” by other cultures and linked to the market economy (Berkes 2012: *Sacred Ecology*).



Sébastien Boillat, PhD

Senior Research Scientist
 Department of Geography and Environment
 University of Geneva
 Switzerland
 Sebastien.Boillat@unige.ch



Elvira Serrano, PhD candidate

Research Scientist and Lecturer
 Facultad de Ciencias Agrícolas y Pecuarias
 Universidad Mayor de San Simón
 Cochabamba, Bolivia
 elviaserrano@hotmail.com



Jamil Alca, PhD

Articulador General del
 Programa Institucional, 2010-2011
 Oficina de Planeamiento y Presupuesto
 Sistema Nacional de Áreas
 Naturales Protegidas
 Peru
 jamilalca@yahoo.com

Policy implications of NCCR North-South research

Engaging indigenous and local people in managing protected areas

Indigenous and local people will be able to co-manage protected areas only if their norms of resource use and local knowledge of biodiversity form the basis of management practices.

Sustainable, equitable income

Schemes for generating revenue should be assessed to ensure that they benefit local populations and that the income they generate is competitive with income from illegal extraction. Regular evaluations and quality control of these schemes should be implemented to assess their effectiveness.

Coordinate and clarify the role of the state

The ambiguous role of the state and the lack of coordination between legal and policy frameworks governing conservation, resource extraction, land tenure, and national development undermine management of protected areas. Governments should coordinate policies and legal frameworks in these areas, and avoid geographic overlaps between areas designated for sustainable resource management and those designated for extraction of non-renewable resources.

Responsible co-management and transparent dialogue

To achieve management by consensus, legal institutions for area co-management, such as management committees, must be given power and responsibilities. This will help to clarify the interests of all actors involved in the conservation and use of resources.

Supporting alternatives

Governments should recognise and actively support local biodiversity conservation initiatives, regardless of whether they involve official protected areas. Such initiatives include community-based and municipal conservation areas; ecotourism and sustainable production; local support programmes for traditional resource use; and campaigns highlighting the value of local knowledge.

Further reading

Alca J. 2008. Estrategias de gestión forestal y gobernanza local: el caso de la Reserva Comunal Amarakaeri-Perú.

Boillat S, Rist S, Serrano E, Ponce D, Delgadillo J. 2008. Struggling 'ontological communities': transformations of conservationists' and peasants' discourses in the Tunari National Park in Bolivia.

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Dilemmas, conflicts, and ways out.

Bottazzi P. 2008. Linking "socio-" and "bio-" diversity: The stakes of indigenous and non-indigenous co-management in the Bolivian lowlands.

Galvin M, Haller T, eds. 2008. People, Protected Areas and Global Change: Participatory Conservation in Latin America, Africa, Asia and Europe.

Oliart P, Biffi V. 2010. *Territorialidad indígena, conservación y desarrollo: discursos sobre la biodiversidad en la Amazonia peruana.*

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Regional Coordination Office of South America - NCCR North-South

Elizabeth Jiménez, PhD
 Postgrado en Ciencias del Desarrollo
 (CIDES- UMSA)
 Av. 14 de septiembre No. 4913
 esq. Calle 3 (Obrajes)
 La Paz, Bolivia
 nccr-sudamerica@cides.edu.bo
 www.nccr-sudamerica.org.bo

This issue

Series editor: Elizabeth Jiménez
 Series coordinator: Patricia Suárez
 Policy advisor: Peter Gerritsen
 Editors: Paul Neate, Jorge Bilbao Paz
 Editorial support: Marlène Thibault, Anu Lannen
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